

# Foreign Foods

## Summary

Foods that represent the culture of families in different countries.

## Materials

- Any good comprehensive food and nutrition textbook.
- *Food for Today*  
, Helen Kowtaluk, McGraw-Hill Glencoe Publishing, 2006 (8 chapters on Global Foods)
- *Guide to Good Food*  
, Velda L. Largen. Goodheart, Wilcox Publishing. (This is an excellent reference for world and United States regional foods.)
- *International Cookbook*  
, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322-1420, 1992.

## Background for Teachers

History, geography, economics, and religion influence the food choices, methods of food preparation, and the food-related activities of families.

Attitudes and values about foods are rooted in society and culture and are transmitted through the family, as society's smallest unit. These values are preserved and practiced by the family in the home, which is the fundamental institution in society.

People who live in different countries or regions of the world develop common interests, institutions, and collective activities. Within families there are reflected certain characteristics of the society and culture in which the family exists. These ethnic languages, customs and values affect individual and family food choices and patterns.

Understanding that good nutrition can be achieved with a wide variety of familiar and unfamiliar foods, is an exciting way to learn to appreciate other cultures. Many factors affect food choices in various parts of the world:

- living patterns affect preparation and food availability (cranberries)
- climate affects what foods will grow (wheat\_\_\_cool; citrus\_\_\_warm; etc.)
- terrain\_\_\_coastal areas, lakes, rivers (fish), grazing (cattle), etc.
- folk lore\_\_\_cows milk is considered dirty in parts of the Orient
- religious beliefs and family traditions (peppermint tea)
- special characteristics of a culture
- economics, wars, etc.
- heritage\_\_\_customs, practices, rituals, folkways, and recipes passed on through generations (hot fudge sundae)
- what could be preserved (beef jerky)

Ethnic and cultural background has a strong impact on family food customs. As cultures (customs, language, dress, etc. of a group of people) developed, food became an important part of each cultural group. The food customs of a particular culture started with agriculture and prevalent animal life which determined what foods were available. The skills of the people determined food preparation and preservation methods.

World cultural traditions are determined to a large extent by geography. It was natural, for example, that areas in Oriental countries developed a cuisine which was centered on rice which grows well there. In tropical cultures, family food patterns developed around the large amounts of fruits and vegetables which grew in abundance. The far northern peoples learned to eat larger amounts of fat

and protein which come from animal sources.

Regional cuisines develop as groups of people cultivate habits and customs more specific to their needs and preferences. Not only is there a European cuisine, there are cuisines specific to each country in Europe. There are regional cuisines within nations. Regional foods are the typical foods prepared or grown in a specific geographic area of a country.

## 2. Religious background

is an important part of ethnic tradition which influences a family's food choices. Religion and religious practices have a strong impact on many families' food traditions, which often can be traced to ancient history.

A good resource for information and activities on religion, culture, and food is the "Food and Culture Mini-Unit" booklet for sale by Nasco. Go to [www.enasco.com](http://www.enasco.com) for ordering details. Below is helpful information on some of the world's major religions:

### BUDDHISM

found predominately in southeast Asia, Korea, and Japan  
people believe that they can eat fish or beef if they personally do not kill it  
most Buddhists live on cereal, fruit, vegetables, fish  
they are basically lacto-ovo-vegetarians (milk, plant, vegetable food sources)  
in some places food is offered to visitors as a sign of right living

### HINDUISM

cows are protected from harm and slaughter  
the kind of food people can eat depends on their rank (caste system)  
the highest castes, Brahmins, eat the finest, cleanest food.  
most Hindus avoid meat, onions, garlic, turnips  
some castes eat anything but beef  
some castes associate the color red with blood and won't eat beets, red dry beans, tomatoes, etc.

### ISLAM/MUSLIM

Arab countries, some parts of Africa, southeast Asia, the Middle East  
may not eat pork or pork products  
sea animals without fins are not consumed by some  
animals are slaughtered according to a ritual  
Muslims eat foods with bare fingers and right hand with shoes off  
During holy month of Ramadan, eating and drinking is forbidden from dawn until dusk--be sensitive to students and plan labs accordingly during this month

### JUDAISM

separate animal food sources into clean and unclean groups  
clean = animals with cloven and divided hooves that chew cud (cows, sheep, goat, oxen)  
unclean = animals with cloven hooves, don't chew cud (pigs)  
meats and fish products may not be eaten together  
foods must be processed and prepared in a prescribed manner, referred to as kosher  
traditions are rooted in the Old Testament times.  
certain foods are specified as part of religious celebrations, such as the Passover meal for Jewish families, unleavened bread, etc. Check your calendar and avoid planning a unit on yeast breads during Passover. Your Jewish students won't be able to consume the products.

### CHRISTIANITY

food habits are often determined by individual religious sects  
Roman Catholic\_\_\_no meat on Friday and during Lent (6 weeks before Easter)\_\_\_these standards have relaxed in recent years but still have influence on food choices during Lent and other special days

Eastern Orthodox\_\_\_no animal products during fasts

Latter-day Saints (Mormons)\_\_\_forbid tea, coffee, alcohol; suggest reduced meat consumption and emphasize grains, fruits and vegetables

Seventh-day Adventist\_\_\_vegetarian diets are advocated

Each family determines its food traditions using its own ethnic background, cultural and religious customs, economic status, likes and dislikes, food availability, and family values.

People who are proud of their cultural heritage use food to preserve that heritage. The holiday customs and traditions that help families feel close are often focused around food. Birthdays, graduations, weddings, anniversaries, Thanksgiving, and Hanukkah are examples. Special foods are often associated with holiday customs.

## FOOD HAS ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Beginning with Marco Polo's travels to China during the Dark Ages, economic centers have grown up around the world's trade. The foods of Asia were not only different than those of Europe, but their flavor was enhanced by the use of seasonings that Europeans had never tasted before and they were much coveted. As explorers introduced new foods, and especially spices to Europe, trade with Asian nations flourished. Historically, the cities of Damascus, Rome, and Athens grew up around the spice trade. India and China are still spice centers of the world. The Americas were discovered in an attempt to facilitate the spice trade. The New World, however, proved rather disappointing in its yield of the varieties of spice Europeans were looking for.

## MARCO POLO

Marco Polo was born in Venice, Italy. He was the son of Nicolo Polo and the nephew of Maffeo Polo, Venetian merchants and business partners. In the course of their trading operations, Nicolo and Maffeo made an overland journey in 1260 to China. They returned to Venice in 1269 and two years later, taking Marco along with them, they began a second journey to China. Their route led from Acre in North Palestine overland to Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf; northward through Persia to the Oxus River in Central Asia; up the Oxus to the Pamirs and across the Pamirs to the region of Sinkiang, China; and finally across the Gobi Desert to the court of Kublai Khan, then at Shangru, China, which the Polos reached in 1275. The brothers and young Marco were the first Europeans to visit most of the territory they traversed in this journey, particularly the Pamirs and the Gobi Desert. Marco Polo excelled all other known Christian travelers in his experience, in his connections to important people, and in his influence. Although Franciscan monks went to Mongolia and back in less than three years, and some stayed in a role of missionary-diplomats, Marco Polo's journey lasted twenty-four years. He reached farther than any known earlier explorers, going beyond Mongolia into the heart of Cathay. He traversed the whole of China, all the way to the Ocean, and he played a variety of roles, becoming the confidant of Kublai Khan who was the ruler, and governor of a great Chinese city. He was at home in the languages of China, and he immersed himself in the daily life and culture of Cathay.

Marco Polo entered Kublai Khan's diplomatic service, acting as his agent on missions to many parts of the Mongol empire, and he was for three years governor of the Chinese city of Yangchow. His father and uncle served as military advisers to Kublai Khan. The Polos stayed in China until 1292, when they left the country as escorts for a Mongolian princess traveling to Persia. The travelers reached that country by sea via Sumatra, southern India, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf; they then went on to Venice, proceeding overland via Tabriz in northwest Persia, the east coast of the Black Sea, and Constantinople, (Istanbul), arriving in their home city in 1295.

In 1298 Marco Polo was captain of a Venetian galley which participated in a battle between the fleets of Venice and Genoa, and he was taken prisoner. During his incarceration in Genoa, he dictated to a fellow-prisoner, Rusticiano of Pisa, the detailed account of his travels. He was released from prison in 1299 and returned to Venice.

The literary work, *The Book of Marco Polo* (first published in French), is perhaps the most famous and influential travel book in history. With a wealth of vivid detail, it gave to medieval Europe its first consequential knowledge of China, and its first information concerning other Asiatic countries, including Siam, Japan, Java, Cochin-China, Ceylon, Tibet, India, and Burma. For a long time it was the only existing source in Europe for information on the geography and life of the Far East. The book became the basis for some of the first accurate maps of Asia made in Europe; it helped to arouse in the navigator, Christopher Columbus, an interest in the Orient which culminated in his discovery of America (1492) while attempting to reach the Far East of Polo's description by sailing due west from Europe; and it suggested the all-sea route from Europe to the Far East around Africa finally accomplished by the Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama (1497-98).

As a result of explorers such as Marco Polo, Columbus and others, an exchange of food products began to take place. People in Europe coveted the foods and spices of the Orient.

There were three principal regions of the world in which food plants were domesticated. The vegetables, fruits and spices from these regions include:

ASIAN NATIVES (some imported B.C.)

citron, apricot, peach, yam, water chestnut, bamboo, eggplant, lemon, lime, orange, melon, cardamon, ginger, cinnamon, turmeric, black pepper, clove, mace, nutmeg, tarragon

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AREA NATIVES (some used B.C.)

mushroom, beet, radish, turnip, carrot, parsnip, asparagus, leek, onion, cabbage, lettuce, artichoke, cucumber, broad bean, pea, olive, apple, pear, cherry grape, fig, date, strawberry, basil, marjoram, oregano, mint, rosemary, sage, savory, thyme, anise, caraway, coriander, cumin, dill, parsley, fennel, bay, caper, fenugreek, garlic, mustard, poppy, sesame, saffron

NEW WORLD NATIVES (imported 15th-16th centuries)

potato, sweet potato, pumpkin, squashes, tomato, kidney bean, lima bean, sweet pepper, avocado, pineapple, allspice, red pepper, vanilla

(Source: *ON FOOD AND COOKING: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen*, Harold McGee, Scribners Publishing, 1984)

Spices, Herbs, Seasonings and Extracts Help Make Each Culture's Foods Unique

Spices, herbs and extracts have much to do with ethnic differences in food. Herbs are the leaves of flowers and plants whose aromas can add flavor to foods. When dried, the flavor is more concentrated than when herbs are fresh. A common herb is basil. Another is rosemary.

Spices are the dried seeds, berries, fruit bark, roots, or flower parts of a plant. Black pepper and sage are common spices in the culture of the United States.

Extracts are made by pressing the oils from aromatic plants and mixing the oils with alcohol. Vanilla is a flavoring that is familiar to most people in the United States. It is made from the bean of the vanilla plant.

Historically, spices and herbs have been used for medicine as well as for flavoring and preserving foods. Their production is of major economic importance in world trade.

Spices, herbs, flavorings, and extracts are distinguished from condiments and sauces. Condiments are made from a number of ingredients including spices and herbs. Catsup, mustard, relish and sauces are common condiments. Sauces include soy sauce, tabasco sauce, and Worcestershire sauce.

Vinegar is made from apple, grape, or other juice. Vinegars are often seasoned with spices and herbs.

Seasonings make foods distinctive and keep meals from being boring. Spices and herbs can replace salt in many foods. This helps reduce the sodium intake, which is too high in the diets of many people living in the United States.

Sodium-free spices and flavorings that could be substituted for table salt, which contains high levels of sodium, include:

allspice                      almond extract    bay leaves

caraway seeds	cinnamon	curry powder
garlic	ginger	lemon extract
mace	maple extract	marjoram
mustard powder	nutmeg	paprika
parsley	pepper	vinegar
pimento	rosemary	sage
sesame seeds	thyme	turmeric
vanilla extract	peppermint extract	walnut extract

## Instructional Procedures

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

#### OPTION #1

Bell Ringer Activity\_\_\_Have the students list as many spices, herbs and extracts as they can in the first few minutes of class. (While roll is being taken.) This could also be a preassessment or formative evaluation activity.

#### OPTION #2

Divide the class into six groups. Have the students prepare a recipe of a food from a particular culture. Do not reveal to the class the cultural origin of any particular recipe. Arrange foods in a smorgasbord and as the students taste each of the foods, have them complete the form [CULTURAL FOOD IDENTIFICATION](#). Have the students share their findings with the class and try to identify the country each food is from and how that food is made.

As a follow-up discussion have them answer the following questions:

Do you think most Americans would like these foods? Why or why not?

Do cultural influences affect our food choices? How?

#### OPTION #3

Have the students work in pairs or groups to research and explore a country's food history and patterns of unique foods. Assign each unit a foreign country to investigate, report on, and prepare a food of that country. A possible alternative is to divide students according to their ancestral origin and have them report on that country. Use [FOOD PRACTICES OF VARIOUS CULTURES AND RELIGIONS](#), [FOREIGN FOODS](#) worksheet and [RECIPES](#) identified in the recipe section of resource materials. Interview members of various cultures and religious faiths as to their food customs and choices.

A large world map would be useful in identifying locations of countries, ethnic and religious groups.

Reference: Guide to Good Food Instructor's Manual.

NOTE TO TEACHER: Make resources available for students' use.

One possible procedure:

Assign each unit a country to research

Have the students divide the unit assignment among themselves in the following manner:

#### Country Report

Location on world map

Terrain and climate

Religious influences on food traditions

Food produced

Interviews which can be recorded on worksheet [FOOD PRACTICES OF VARIOUS CULTURES AND RELIGIONS](#)

Cookbooks for various cuisines

Ethnic foods in a grocery store

Centerpiece depicting the culture of country

As units give their reports, have the rest of the class take notes.

Following completion of the report on each country, have that group select and supervise a laboratory experience for the class that includes preparation and tasting of a food typical of that country.

#### OPTION #4

As a homework or extra-credit assignment have the students attend or research ethnic festivals or religious celebrations in the community and report on the foods served. Examples: A Greek Festival or October Fest usually held in the fall in the United States; secular holidays such as Thanksgiving, Jewish Passover, Chinese New Year, etc.

#### OPTION #5

Using [COOKBOOKS FOR VARIOUS CUISINES](#) students can research cookbooks available in the local library and/or bookstores and identify cuisines represented.

#### OPTION #6

Have the students make a map showing the origin of seasonings. Use [SEASONING CATEGORIES](#) to identify seasonings to be placed on the map. As the teacher lectures, identify sources of spices and herbs on the map of [THE WORLD](#). Show samples of spices.

#### OPTION #7

Have the students prepare a Food Round Robin by letting each unit prepare a dish made with a different spice. Section paper plates with magic markers and label each section with the name of one spice. All students should taste test all the different foods. Vote for favorites. Discuss why some are better liked than others. Suggested foods include: (Others may be chosen from any good recipe book.)

Saffroned rice

Curried rice

Poppy seed cake (from cake mix)

Ginger snaps

Caraway bread sticks

Chive omelettes

Rosemary scrambled eggs

Dill bread

#### OPTION #8

As a demonstration tie long sprigs of basil and rosemary together and use as a basting brush for meat or poultry. Demonstrate the preparation of chicken breasts with several spices. Let the students taste the product.

#### OPTION #9

Have the students prepare [BUBBLING CHEESE BREAD](#). Cut the bread into squares. As a substitute for, or in addition to the garlic and onion powders in the recipe use a variety of other spices on each section. Have the students react to the various spices used.

#### OPTION #10

Have the students participate in a lab experience preparing [RICE MOLD or CURRIED RICE](#).

#### OPTION #11

Students will interview classmates, school officials, etc., about their ethnic foods. Use [TRACK THE SOURCE OF A RECIPE](#) handout. Obtain their favorite recipes and prepare a recipe in lab to share with rest of the class.

#### OPTION #12

Invite a foreign exchange student to class to discuss problems with food customs in the student's new home. Question: Were these problems resolved? If so, how?

Summarize the presentation by listing the alternatives the speaker had and the consequences faced by each alternative.

Question: Do you believe he or she selected the best alternative? Why or why not?

Have the students brainstorm the problems related to food that they would find in the exchange student's native country.

Questions: How do you think you would resolve these problems? Does looking at both sides influence your feelings of acceptance for cultural differences?

OPTION #13

Students will investigate specific foods or food groups and identify preparation methods and serving customs. Examples: breads, grains, beverages, meats, sweets such as cakes, cookies, candies, etc.

OPTION #14

Arrange for the students to visit local food stores and identify the different ethnic or special foods available. [ETHNIC FOODS AVAILABLE IN GROCERY STORES](#).

OPTION #15

Have tasting experiences ( [LAB TASTING EXPERIENCE](#) ) in class to investigate different foods.

Examples: breads, cheeses, fruits and vegetables not native to the local area.

OPTION #16

Students will identify language influences on food traditions. Complete the worksheet, [THE LANGUAGE OF FOOD](#).

OPTION #17

Have the students develop bulletin boards portraying ethnic and/or religious foods, traditions, etc.

OPTION #18

Invite a guest to demonstrate the preparation of a traditional food from his/her family or ethnic background.

OPTION #19

Have each unit prepare a different cultural food and display all of them at a food fair.

OPTION #20

Students will complete the [FOREIGN FOODS UNIT TEST](#).

Authors

[PEARL HART](#)

[Utah LessonPlans](#)